

JUMP CUT

A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA

JUMP CUT ON LINE, SORT OF.....

by John Hess, Chuck Kleinhans, Julia Lesage

The following article was printed as “**THE LAST WORD**” in *JUMP CUT*, #40

from *Jump Cut*, no. 40, March 1996, pp. 136-138

copyright *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, 1996, 2006

The retail price of this issue is \$8.00, reflecting a necessary price increase due to higher paper, printer, and mailing costs. We're also raising subscription prices. For about the past year, realizing that we'd have to hike our prices, we've been spurred to consider some alternatives. In particular, we're evaluating the merits and problems of either producing *Jump Cut* as a totally electronic journal (that is appearing only on line or on digital media such as computer disks) or having an electronic version of it while continuing printed-on-paper publication. We surveyed many of our long-time readers and writers about this, and they overwhelmingly responded that they wanted a *Jump Cut* on paper, one they could hold in their hands. So for a while, at least, we'll continue our conventional publication.

As editors and writers ourselves, we've been putting out *Jump Cut* using computer desktop publishing since the late 80s, and we've conducted a lot of the business of the publication by electronic mail. And we've written articles together by sending drafts back and forth electronically. We're enthused about this new direction and think it offers new possibilities for *Jump Cut*. At the same time, we recognize that it is a new thing for many of our readers and writers. There are numerous considerations, and we want to share our thinking with you. The key concern we have is balancing the availability of *Jump Cut* with the practical aspects of putting it out.

Our basic goals remain the same: to develop radical media criticism; to link media artists, academics, and activists; to develop and extend new areas of criticism. We've always wanted to make the publication widely accessible. We started *Jump Cut* in 1974 with a low-cost, feasible technology (offset tabloid newsprint from typewriter copy). From the start, we've modestly self-subsidized the production of *Jump Cut*. When we've had a bit more extra income, we've put it into areas that would improve the product (such as better quality paper), or we purchased services so we could increase the amount of time we spend editing. However, in the past few years some things have changed. One is that all three of the co-editors now have full time jobs, which limits the

amount of time available for ***Jump Cut*** tasks. Another is that we're experiencing some financial tightening. For a context, you should be aware that our subscription base remains fairly stable, but bookstore sales (in the past always about 2/3-3/4 of our sales) have fallen off due to several factors:

- *the loss of small independent bookstores (especially left, feminist, etc.) through chainstore competition; and
- *the difficulty of getting display space in highly rationalized chainstore operations where every inch is calculated in terms of short term profit yield.

We are also concerned about:

- *sharply increasing prices of paper due to various international trade considerations; and
- *a gradual but steady increase in printing and mailing costs.

In the past, we have, given considerable thought to some changes. In the late 70s and early 80s we investigated funding ***Jump Cut*** substantially through grant money. We decided not to go this route because it seemed editors then occupied much of their time with grant getting rather than editing, and grant income was uncertain, especially if the publication was committed to radical politics. In retrospect, it seems we were right: many grant-dependent parts of the independent art sector have collapsed in the past ten years. For example, ***Art Paper*** (Minneapolis) folded, and ***Afterimage*** has shrunk drastically in size and had to reorganize.

Another possibility was to turn the business end of ***Jump Cut*** over to a university press, as some publications such as ***Social Text***, ***Socialist Review***, and ***Camera Obscura*** did in the late 80s and early 90s. What worried us about this approach was that at some point or other it gave final editorial control to a university and thus ultimately to the board of trustees and/or a state legislature. It seemed that given the current political climate, it was unlikely that articles and illustrations that we've run in the past such as those on sexual images, gay porn, safe sex education, and Disney films would be published. (Of course, the new Telecommunications Act attempts to restrict sexual images and all "indecent" on the Internet and will result in some kinds of censorship. Although much remains to be settled by the courts.) In the past year, we've had our skepticism confirmed. Many university presses have refused to publish work on Disney by various scholars including art historian David Kunzle (UCLA) specifically because they use images for which Disney Corp. claims it total rights, which it will not grant for academic purposes. Not surprisingly, as faithful servants of the ruling order, university administrators and university lawyers have been unwilling to argue a strong "fair use" copyright case against Disney. In another example of self-censorship, the new anthology by Cory Creekmur and Alex Doty, ***Out in Culture*** (Duke UP) reprints Tom Waugh's ***Jump Cut*** piece comparing straight and gay pornography, but without the illustrations in the original.

There are some very positive aspects of changing ***Jump Cut*** to an electronic publication which would be available: (1) through e-mail subscription (anyone with a computer, modem, and e-mail address would be able to get it), or (2) on the World Wide Web through a homepage (the reader would need access to the Web which now is typically open to people at colleges and universities through computers that are hardwired into the university's mainframe), and (3) possibly on diskettes.

Right now ***Jump Cut*** is printed on the basis of a process (commercial offset lithography from desktop published layout) in which it is expensive to do the initial set up of creating the plates for the press and setting up the presses. However, once the presses start rolling, a copy's individual cost is minimal. If we shifted to an electronic format, and put it on the World Wide Web, ***Jump Cut*** could be free to everyone with WWW access. If a reader wanted a paper copy, they could print it out for themselves. If we went primarily electronic, but had some readers who wanted a paper copy, the cost of printing any one page would be relatively small but constant—essentially like laser printing digital material or xeroxing it. Thus, we could put out a copy of ***Jump Cut*** from the digital material for about the same as xeroxing and binding an issue—this issue would have cost about \$7.00 for one copy plus about \$0.50 for binding, plus mailing costs. So if we had a copy shop make us printed copies for those who wanted them and mail them, an issue might cost about \$12.00 delivered in the U.S.

A. We could still have subscriptions: for sending diskettes, or e-mailing an issue only after receiving payment. But we've never thought of ***Jump Cut*** as a profit-making entity. So if we eliminated the costs of printing and mailing, we'd have no reason to charge for the publication. ***Jump Cut*** could be free to those who use the Internet (except for costs of user hardware and software and access time). Many of our writers and readers now have some kind of access to the net, and it seems certain that this will continue to increase at a rapid rate. We can assume that many more people, especially students and some people abroad, would read it and have ready access to it. It would also allow the placing of back issues on file. With back issues available online, ***Jump Cut*** could be easily searched for research purposes.

B. We could publish more frequently. At present the burden of layout, printing, and distribution is such that it takes a lot of time. Given our day jobs, it's easier to do layout in one extended push. However, with electronic publication, once an article was in its final form, it could be posted on the Web homepage. (This is now called "preprint" and is widely used in science and medical publishing.) When we decided we had a "full" issue, we would declare it complete and published, and then we'd start another issue of articles-in-waiting. This would give us online publication of reviews and articles based on new films much closer to their release. It would also let us have more current responses to articles and hopefully a more fluid exchange of views. We would remain a refereed, edited publication, not a bulletin board.

C. We could incorporate color still and moving images and sound in articles. This would be easiest through the Web. ***Postmodern Culture*** recently ran an article using close frame analysis by [Robert Kolker](#). Chuck Kleinhans now has an article-in-progress on Northwestern University's Radio/Television/Film Dept. homepage that uses short clips from four films to illustrate points: "Cultural Appropriation and Subcultural Expression: The Dialectics of Cooptation and Resistance" : [Postmodern Culture](#) is probably closest to what we imagine ***Jump Cut*** to be: relatively long academic/intellectual articles and reviews. In some fields of science and medicine, electronic journals have an established place.

At the same time, we're see some obvious problems:

A. Not everyone has access to the Web now, and in the future the situation is somewhat uncertain in that parts of it may be privatized. In the U.S. we can expect that most colleges and universities will provide some kind of access to students and faculty. Some public libraries already provide Web access and many provide Internet access. Individuals with their own computers, modems, and ability to purchase line services (such as America Online, CompuServe, etc.) can access the net...but

the cost can quickly become prohibitive. If we distributed simply by e-mail, it would be sent to someone's electronic mailbox where they could download it and print out their own copy.

Abroad the situation is uneven. Access is much less likely in developing nations and areas. On the other hand, ***Jump Cut*** has relatively few subscribers in such areas, and we would be able to easily reach people via the net we've never otherwise had contact with (e.g., Eastern Europe). Posting ***Jump Cut*** on the Web would give access to people who could never expect to buy a subscription in U.S. dollars. Given that the prospective readers of ***Jump Cut*** around the world work in media areas, they are among the most likely to gain access to the net.

B. Few people want to read a long article on a screen-thus people would likely have to download it. It would take some time to download a whole issue: less if one is using a high speed line in a university setting, more if one is working with a modem over telephone lines. All this promises to change drastically in the next few years. And time on line costs money, especially for users of commercial online services. And if the issue still had to be printed out, it wouldn't save trees.

C. Because of this, people's style of reading would likely change. Many people would chose to download only those articles that seemed most immediately interesting. And they'd be unlikely then to "discover" an article on a topic they didn't already have an interest in. Browsing ***Jump Cut*** in a bookstore or on library shelves would be a thing of the past. Browsing online would be the norm.

D. We're not sure what this all means to librarians. If ***JC*** goes electronic, how will people who now find it in their library discover it? Is it important to maintain some kind of printed ***Jump Cut*** for archival or other purposes? Over the past few months, we've asked several/of our writers about participating in a first electronic issue, and some have enthusiastically agreed to do so, while others have had serious reservations. For the moment, we'll be publishing "traditional" issues. In the meantime we will develop our WWW homepage, and perhaps start to put some articles up on the Web as an experiment.

We've been greatly helped in setting it up by Jeremy Butler, the wizard of the net for media folks. Jeremy's [SCREENSITE](#) provides a gateway to many Web and Internet media resources.

[To top](#) [Current issue](#) [Archived essays](#) [Jump Cut home](#)